

The Caste System and Hinduism

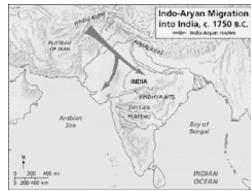
AP World History

Questions

- By implementing the caste system, what was accomplished?
- How is this similar to China? Persia?
- Can you apply the caste system to high school?

Caste Origins

- Aryan invaders create social order
- Hereditary, defines societal roles, occupation
- *Varna* = "color" - racial differences
- Based upon idea that people are different, should have different roles



Four *Varnas*

- Brahmins / Priests - intellectual and spiritual leaders
- Kshatriya / Warriors and aristocrats - protectors of society
- Vaishyas / Merchants, farmers, artisans - skilled producers
- Shudras / unskilled labor
- Untouchables - outside of caste system

Characteristics

- Caste defined occupation, diet, social interactions, style of dress
- Shudras, untouchables excluded - could not read/hear *Vedas*
- Duty of monarch to maintain system
- Lack of individualism

Connections to Hinduism

- Indian leaders believed it to be supernaturally ordained
- Brahmins spiritual leaders of India, advised kings, emperors
- Upward social mobility only through reincarnation
- Collected karma influences next life

Early Hinduism Declines

- Sacrifices too great, rituals too tedious
- Buddhism expands - provides alternative to caste system
- Buddha seen as a savior - help ALL people find salvation
- Laypeople could perform good works => salvation

Early Hinduism Declines

- Emperor Ashoka



Hindu Resurgence

- Decline of Mauryan Empire = decline of Buddhism in India
- Brahmins make it more appealing to common people
- Stressed importance of personal worship, devotion to individual gods
- Karma acquired by completion of caste duties / obligations

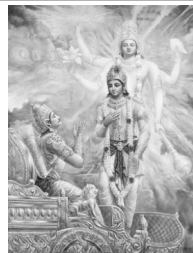
Hindu Resurgence

- Devotional cults open to all castes
- Created more "milestone" rituals
- Over time Buddha worshipped as a worldly form of Vishnu



Hindu Resurgence

- Salvation attainable by all
- *Bhagavad Gita* - Poem that represented new ethical teachings - individuals could escape cycle of reincarnation (the ultimate reality or *moksha*)

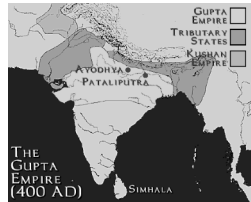


Aims of Human Life

- *Dharma* - Obedience to religious and moral laws
- *Artha* - The pursuit of economic well-being and honest prosperity
- *Kama* - The enjoyment of social and physical interactions
- A proper balance of these would help an individual attain *moksha*

Gupta Empire

- Supported Hinduism - restored Brahmins in gov't
- Extensive building of temples
- Caste system reasserted / solidified into Indian culture - more rigid
- Expanded with new *Jatis*
- Further restrictions put on Untouchables



Questions

- Why do you think modern day India has such a difficult time eliminating the caste system to day?
- Some Hindu scholars argue that the caste system actually contradicts Hinduism, what is your reaction?
- In the end, what single factor allowed Hinduism to flourish and Buddhism decline?